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sistance to the real control of nuclear weapons by other NATO powers has always been the isolation of either France or West Germany—a danger that now looms large.

WHERE WE GO FROM HERE is very far from certain. The basic dilemma we have faced right along—a dilemma that has as yet no solution—is that no effective means has been found for multilateral command and control of a NATO nuclear force. Command by committee is never satisfactory, least of all within the quick-reaction framework of modern war. Many fingers on the trigger mean paralysis, or alternatively the increased danger of diffused responsibility.

Another dilemma now shapes up as a major one: unless the United States pays the costs, a NATO nuclear deterrent in any form is likely to be very expensive for our European partners. When all the cost figures are in, they may decide that the cost will be worth the slightly increased integration and the possession of a slightly louder political voice. But if they do, they are very unlikely at the same time to strengthen their conventional forces, which has long been the U.S. objective.

Perhaps the greatest hope for the future lies in the development of a series of national nuclear-deterrent forces that in time may blend into a European minimum nuclear deterrent. The process is already well started in France and in Britain. If the Nassau Conference had not occurred, Paris and London might have been on the way to some kind of technical-strategic rapprochement by now. To many allies and to the Russians, the specter of Bonn in charge of its own national nuclear deterrent is fearsome. Yet no alliance has room for second-best allies or discriminatory practices. A really co-ordinated multinational European nuclear deterrent, keyed to the two principles of collective European control without an American veto and of minimum deterrence, probably offers the best hope for tomorrow. It is time to recognize that President de Gaulle has a point, to shift our emphasis to co-ordination rather than integration, and to attempt to influence, rather than to control, Europe's nuclear future.

AT HOME & ABROAD

Laos: The Settlement That Settled Nothing

CPYRGHT **STANLEY KARNOW**

LAST JULY 23 the fourteen-nation Geneva Conference established a "truly neutral" Laos, and to the United States and the Soviet Union, both anxious to avoid "the wrong war in the wrong place," it seemed that a solution of sorts had been found for the most confused, exasperating problem east of the Congo. Now, almost nine months later, civil war between the Pathet Lao and neutralist troops has broken out again in violation of the military truce, and the country seems closer to a *de facto* partition than to neutrality.

Composed of leaders from the country's three factions, the Laotian government is supposed to blend these contending forces into a unified state. The nominal head of this coalition is the prime minister, Prince Souvanna Phouma. In principle at least, his function is to harmonize the competing ambitions of his rival deputies, his pro-Communist half-brother Prince Souphanouvong and General Phoumi Nosavan, the former CIA protégé who is usually labeled "right-wing." Bringing these quarrelsome elements together was in itself a prodigious exercise that involved everything from international pressure to sheer bribery. But their association, seemingly a sign of progress, has obviously not resolved their deeper antipathies, and there is no visible likelihood that it will. This is a "troika" with built-in weaknesses. One shortcoming is the personality of Souvanna Phouma himself. A placid, pipe-smoking aristocrat whose principal passion in life is bridge, he can be disarmingly naïve and easily swayed. Moreover, in an alliance of feudal barons, each as strong as the army he controls, Souvanna Phouma is at a distinct disadvantage. His only internal military support is General Kong Le's group of not more than eight thousand troops, currently under attack by the Pathet Lao on the Plaine des Jarres, a plateau north of Vientiane. With cruel accuracy, local wits call